

which it was too racially heterogeneous to face with equanimity. Henceforth the Triple Entente and the Central Powers were openly ranged against one another, Italy drifted ever further away from her nominal allies, and in the autumn of 1909 a secret treaty, signed during the Tsar's visit to Victor Emmanuel at Racconigi, made her almost a junior partner of the Triple Entente. Roumania, too, angered by Hungary's harsh treatment of her children in Transylvania, could no longer be relied on to fulfil her obligations to the Central Powers in case of war. Worst of all, from the standpoint of Berlin and Vienna, the gulf between England and Germany was becoming too wide to bridge.

The conclusion of the Algeiras Conference had brought temporary relief to Western Europe, and in the autumn of 1907 William II paid a happy visit to England, in the course of which participation in the Bagdad railway was again discussed, though without result. No genuine appeasement was possible in a Continent divided into rival camps, and the Second Hague Conference in 1907 had not even discussed the limitation of armaments. 1908 was a year of blunders and crises. The German fleet aroused growing alarm, which the Kaiser increased by a well-meant but ill-judged private letter to Lord Tweedmouth, First Lord of the Admiralty. A new German Navy Bill in April decided the British Government to raise the question of naval limitation officially during King Edward's visit to his nephew at Cronberg on the way to Marienbad in the summer; but Sir Charles Hardinge, the bearer of the message, found the door bolted and barred. No discussion of a question involving national honour, declared the Kaiser hotly, could be allowed. It seemed as if there was nothing for England to do except to increase her navy, while

drawing ever
closer to France and Russia; and Lord
Roberts began his
campaign for a conscript army. When
rumours of secret
acceleration of German ship-building reached
the Admiralty
early in 1909, a panic swept the country, and
eight battleships
of the Dreadnought type, an unprecedented
number, were
laid down in that year.

In the summer of 1909, when for the first time
the probability
of an ultimate collision with Germany came home
to the British
people, the slippery Bulow was succeeded by
Bethmann Holl-
weg. The former had never desired war, but he
had supported the Kaiser's naval plans, which had done
even more
than Germany's Morocco policy to drive
England into the